

Tennesse Sierran

SIERRA CLUB
TENNESSEE CHAPTER

The bi-monthly state newsletter of the Tennessee Chapter of the Sierra Club

Volume 54, Number 1 - January / February 2021

Native Grass Restoration at Rocky Mount State Historic Site

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Vol. 54, No. 1 - January / February 2021

Tennesse-Sierran
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Thank You, Marquita Bradshaw!

"I believe that policies should ensure that people have healthy and safe places to live, learn, work, worship, and recreate, I am passionate about environmental policies and how the physical environment and human health are related."

In a decisive primary victory, Tennessee State Chapter Environmental Justice Chair Marquita Bradshaw was elected by Democratic Party voters as their candidate for the U.S. Senate. A native Tennessean, Marquita is a longtime community activist and advocate for environmental justice. Her campaign rallied progressive voters and illuminated environmental justice issues for all Tennesseans. Thank you and congratulations, Marquita!

Masthead photo ©2012 by Ron Schrieves.
Cover photo: A variegated fritillary in a
patch of little bluestem at Rocky Mount
State Historic Site. Photo by Melanie Kelley.

From Mac Post, State Chair



How to Volunteer for Your Local Sierra Club

The U.S. elections are over and the next administration appears to be preparing to reverse some of the over 100 environmental rule rollbacks initiated during the anti-regulatory Trump administration. It will be hard to reverse the negative effects of many of these rules that include shrinking of national monuments to allow mining, elimination of the clean water rule protecting wetlands, opening up oil drilling in the Atlantic and Arctic oceans, rescinding the Clean Power Plan intended to reduce CO₂ emissions, reducing the protections to plants and animals under the Endangered Species Act, and much more. It is up to environmental organizations to join in the effort by using local actions, supporting legislation at state and national levels, and joining litigation.

The Sierra Club is a key organization in this fight and your help is needed to reduce the impact and help reverse these environmental assaults. The Sierra Club is a large and complex organization, tackling

many environmental issues at local, regional and national scales. The Club contains chapters, groups, committees, and working groups, all run by volunteers. We have bylaws, standing rules, and guidance that enable it to have a unified voice, operating as one club rather than a federation of independent subgroups. This is an advantage in providing many opportunities for you to, as a volunteer, pursue issues for which you are passionate. It also, however, makes it difficult, if not intimidating, to figure out how to sign up to help and participate.

The main strength of the Sierra Club is that most of the action takes place locally. Reducing the impacts of leaking landfills and leaking coal ash piles, gas pipeline compressor stations, confined animal feeding operations, and development on water quality, wetlands and natural areas, are often on our plate. Advancing use of and increasing availability of renewable energy, advancing equitable transportation policies, strengthening community-wide recycling, and persuading municipalities to eliminate CO₂ emissions are long term projects that always require new ideas and renewed energy that comes from additional volunteers.

To join our efforts, the place you should start is with the contacts for the Tennessee Chapter's Groups and Conservation Committees listed to the right. Also check out the Chapter and Group websites at www.sierraclub.org/tennessee (especially the new Join Our Teams pages) and Facebook. Please be aware that this is only a start. While welcoming to new and interested volunteers, we tend not to be very good at getting people started on the path to engagement, at least immediately. Please don't take this as a lack of interest in your participation — your contribution matters. Activities include, but are not limited to, help with publicity and social media, arranging programs, leading outings, attending public meetings, fundraising, etc. It may take some time for busy volunteers to get back to you and begin the process of helping you find a way to be engaged. If you are reading this, you have taken the first step. Please be patient, and persistent. We need you to volunteer. We look forward to working with you!

Dr. Joe Schiller Receives Award

by JoAnn McIntosh, Clarksville-Montgomery County Conservation Committee



Dr. Joe Schiller, longtime member of the Sierra Club and active participant/advisor to the Clarksville-Montgomery County Conservation Committee, is the 2020 recipient of the Conservation Education Award presented by the Soil Conservation Service and local Kiwanis Clubs.

"I was very pleased to receive this award. I put a lot into environmental education throughout my career," Schiller said. The Conservation Education Award recognizes "efforts by teachers to advance the wise use, protection and enhancement of the nation's soil, water and related resources" by "creating innovative activities reaching students and a variety of other audiences."

Schiller understands it is necessary to play the long game with environmental activism. "My career started when I was studying the effect of strip mining for coal on streams in Tennessee. It was a long-drawn-out struggle but it appears that we are near the end of the era of coal. It's nice to see this happen in my lifetime."

Schiller, now retired from the Biology Department of Austin Peay State University (APSU), spent much of his professional career in research on aquatic ecology and the bioassessment of watersheds. His doctoral dissertation for his Ph.D. in Zoology (UT Knoxville, 1986) was on the effects of strip mining on aquatic communities in the Cumberland Mountains. As a professor, he has taken graduate students back to this original study site to follow up on the stream health 20 years later, resulting in at least three masters' theses on the topic.

Schiller taught courses in Zoological Diversity and Aquatic Biology and Water Quality Control, plus a course he created, Sustaining Biodiversity, an "honors/service-learning course that provided students an understanding of the interdisciplinary studies necessary for a sustainable biological future."

Schiller's work in conservation has extended beyond the formal classroom. He served as Conservation Chair for the Warioto Audubon Society, authored many articles for the lay public on conservation issues, and presented programs for educational events provided by Friends of Dunbar Cave. As a longtime member of the Sierra Club, he has provided expertise to the Chapter, local citizens and governmental officials on conservation issues.

Schiller's recent and ongoing educational activities have focused on a contemporary aspect of conservation not usually associated with this award recognition: renewable energy. While at APSU, he initiated and served as advisor for a local chapter of Students Organized to Advance Renewable Energy, and worked with members to implement the Student Sustainability Fee on campus, which has funded many initiatives. He is a recognized expert and consultant on this very "current" issue.

Schiller and his family reside in southern Montgomery County on a small farming homestead personally designed to be "off the grid."

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Tennes-Sierran

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Submissions

Feb Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by Jan 22

March Issue of the Chapter E-Newsletter by Feb 19

March / April Issue of The Tennes-Sierran by Jan 30

Request Submission Guidelines at sierratnnews@gmail.com

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TENNESSEE CHAPTER

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Defending Tennessee's Waters

by Sarah Ellis, Volunteer Writer

For Tennesseans, much of the water we use comes from the ground underneath our feet. Thanks to our state's underground network of caves and streams, groundwater is widely available — and, for the most part, clean and safe to drink. Ten percent of Tennesseans draw their drinking water directly from a private well or spring, and many more benefit from the groundwater used to power agriculture and help natural ecosystems flourish.

But clean water is by no means a given; in fact, waters across the nation may soon be under threat of contamination. In 2019, the Trump-era EPA finalized a rollback of the 2015 Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule, which provided broad federal protections for bodies of water from wetlands to rivers to streams. The new rule (called the Navigable Waters Protection Rule) is significantly narrower, restricting protections to "navigable" waters a boat can pass through. This leaves numerous other bodies of water vulnerable to pollution or destruction, including ephemeral streams.

What does that mean for Tennessee? This EPA reversal could build political momentum to weaken Tennessee's Water Quality Control Act, which offers protection for wetlands, groundwater, and headwater streams. Without it, water protections in our state would be severely diminished. "We've been losing wetlands consistently over the years," says Axel Ringe, Chair of the Sierra Club Tennessee Chapter Water Quality Committee. "We really can't afford to lose more of them; they provide a significant ecological function in terms of water purification, biodiversity, and habitat."

In the summer of 2020, the Tennessee Water Group (TWG) began meeting virtually to discuss this issue. They're preparing to defend Tennessee's Water Quality Control Act against potential adverse legislation, which could come up when the Tennessee General Assembly reconvenes on January 12, 2021. "We've been talking to various experts on hydrology and water quality across the state to get expert testimony we can use if a bill like that actually does come before the legislature," Ringe says. He hopes these experts can speak to the scientific necessity of keeping groundwater clean and protected.

TWG includes a vast collective of environmentalists, activists, and legal scholars, such as the Harpeth Conservancy, the Southern Environmental Law Center, and Protect Our Aquifer in Memphis. "We're kind of circling our wagons at this point, and we'll see what happens," Ringe explains. If the Water Quality Control Act does come under threat, TWG will need Sierra Club members to get involved. "If necessary, we'll be asking people to call or write their legislators," Ringe says. "Start bombarding them with their perspective that they don't want Tennessee's waters to be any dirtier than they are."

Of course, the hope is that this won't become a pressing statewide issue. If the incoming Biden administration reinstates the old WOTUS rule, a state-level rollback is less likely to succeed. Still, TWG is ready for the worst-case scenario. "We want to be able to preserve the purity of that groundwater," Ringe says, "not only for the ecological function, but for the people of Tennessee so they can drink it."

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Politics in the Age of Covid

by Kent Minault, HBG Political Committee

The August 6 primary election results gave the Harvey Broome Group (HBG) Political Team a serious reality check. We'd helped elect Courtney Durrett to the County Commission, but our other three endorsees lost. Furthermore, after a lot of discussion and soul-searching, we had endorsed Matthew Park on the Democratic ballot for Tennessee Assembly District 15. This was tough because the district was home to the region's largest concentration of African American voters. Park, a young White candidate, was running against two experienced Black leaders. Many on our ExCom were opposed to unseating an incumbent Black legislator, even though Park was endorsed by Black Coffee Justice, a nonprofit organization working for social justice, and had strong support in the community. But a scandal emerged involving the incumbent Rick Staples' misappropriation of campaign funds, resulting in an endorsement for Park from both HBG and the Chapter. And here was our reality check: Park lost the primary to the African American challenger, Sam MacKenzie, by 23 votes. If we'd worked a little harder, could we have swung a few more votes for Park?

But the primary brought another challenge. Some members of the HBG ExCom had hosted a digital meet-and-greet with James Mackler, running to replace Lamar Alexander as Tennessee's U.S. senator. Mackler was bright, presentable and well-funded, and gave good answers to our questions about climate change and closing TVA's coal-fired power plants. But we were unsure about endorsing. For one thing, our State Chapter's Environmental Justice Chair, Marquita Bradshaw, was running for the same seat. We had to be impartial and not endorse her because of her Club position. Marquita was an experienced organizer and environmental justice champion. Should we endorse the strong environmental justice candidate or the more "realistic" one?

Our hesitation left both of them unendorsed for the primary, and when the results came in on August 6, Marquita had won by a substantial margin even though Mackler had some 20 times the money. For the general election, we had to think carefully about whom to endorse and how to mobilize support. Our first move was to get rid of conventional ideas of "electability" — which generally means white, male and

(continued on page 6)

Clarksville-Montgomery County Conservation Committee Has Active 2020

The Clarksville-Montgomery County Conservation Committee kept up its momentum in 2020 in spite of Covid-19. Highlights included a public sustainability forum in September for Clarksville City Council candidates, three of whom had received endorsements from the TN Chapter. In October, they worked with the county Sustainability Task Force to prepare a public webinar about residential solar power to be offered in January. Presenters will include representatives from Clarksville Dept. of Electricity (CDE), Cumberland Electric Membership Corp (CEMC), TVA, Tennessee Solar Energy Industry Association (TenneSEIA) and local residents with solar panels.

Chapter Gets BCC Staff Position

The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign (BCC) plans to hire a full-time Campaign Representative for Tennessee. The position was selected as the pilot for the new Sierra Club equitable hiring process. The plan is to have the new hire in place by February 1, but March 1 may be more likely.

"BCC and the Tennessee Chapter have set an example for how well national campaigns and chapters can work together to achieve Sierra Club goals," Bill Moll, Chapter Political Committee Chair and Conservation Chair, said.

Politico Magazine called BCC "the most extensive, expensive and effective campaign in the Club's 123-year history, and maybe the history of the environmental movement."

The BCC representative will, in coordination with volunteers, partner groups and community leaders, develop and implement a campaign to retire coal-fired power plants, scale clean energy growth, prevent new gas power plants, and end destructive coal mining in Tennessee. "The Tennessee Chapter looks forward to working with our new BCC rep in achieving more renewable energy for Tennessee," Moll said.

More details and an application form are at <https://bit.ly/SC-CareerCenter>

Group Scoop

Cherokee Group

The Cherokee Group is looking forward to the new year and a new United States president, who we hope will swiftly bring back the many environmental protections that have been lost and immediately address the climate crisis. With our also-newly-elected ExCom members ready to join the old hands, we will continue our work locally on climate issues, responding to TVA when necessary, and monitoring (as well as objecting to when needed) the interstate highway and stadium construction in the midst of the South Chickamauga Creek wetlands. We will also be reaching out to Chattanooga's new mayor (who will be elected in March) to see that the city's environmental standards continue and expand. Speaking of elections, our members helped work on Marquita Bradshaw's U.S. Senate campaign and she did well in Hamilton County. We salute her courage and drive to bring light to environmental concerns to every single county in our state. We are proud to have a Sierran like Marquita. We are working to improve our outreach at our current online meetings, but we'd sure like to be able to be back in person. Until then, save your fourth Mondays at 7 pm eastern and come Zoom with us — we always have something interesting.

Chickasaw Group

Despite COVID, the Chickasaw Group has been quite active. We attended a remembrance of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill 10 years ago. Later that same week our regular program meetings highlighted Earth Day +50. We hosted a forum on the future of energy in June and in September had an excellent program on dams and their effect on river systems. Its focus was on Patagonia and it almost felt like a virtual outing. We also had a program on the election, and in November one on electric cars. Our conservation committee has also been active, working on issues such as the Byhalia Pipeline and the potential Memphis Light, Gas and Water's severance from Tennessee Valley Authority.

Harvey Broome Group

The production of "Tennessee on the Rise!" — a candidate support video for HBG-endorsed candidates in this year's election — geared HBG up for using video in more of its work, resulting in the HBG YouTube page. Check out the videos, including a conversation between Sam McKenzie and David Hayes offering an insightful take on the to-do list for Black leadership, on the HBG YouTube page at <https://bit.ly/HBG-YouTube>. HBG is also focused on The City Council Movement, a campaign to put representatives of Knoxville's low-income communities of color on city council. To strengthen HBG's connection with this group, political chair Kent Minault attended two sessions of the People's Assembly last month, both examining attitudes about safety.

Middle Tennessee Group

Middle Tennessee Group has been busy with numerous environmental concerns including working to pass low-income weatherization resolution to adopt a Nashville Electric Service automatic round-up enrollment program that will fund low income energy efficiency improvements, and support a Pilot Sustainability Education Project that involves school-age children in minimizing waste and maximizing sustainability. Our popular monthly Program Presentations have featured Aaron Deter-Wolf speaking on the fascinating ongoing study of the mound bottom Tennessee and State Archaeological Area and Tennessee State Park Naturalist Randy Hedgepath. Covid has increased our creativity in hosting interactive gatherings and we have some great events on the horizon!

Dan Joranko has recently served on the Energy and Climate Committee of the Mayor's Sustainability Advisory Council. He also convenes the Climate Nashville coalition, of which the MTG group is a member. One recent successful campaign was the Metro Council Ordinance which updated Nashville's Energy Efficiency Building Standards.

Native Grasses Restoration Project in Rocky Mount State Historic Site

by Bobbi Smith, Care NET Community Conservation Committee of TN Sierra Club

On Rocky Mount State Historic Site's 40 acres, visitors will find a flock of authentic Cotswold sheep, a blacksmith shop, and gardens maintained by Master Gardeners. On the grounds, passionate costumed interpreters, educators, museum guides and volunteers share their expertise with guests, who leave with greater knowledge of the history of Northeast Tennessee. And in the state-of-the-art museum are 18th and 19th century artifacts and valuable historical information.

And then there are the acres of pasture—including a spring, a small pond and woodlots—where an exceptional fledgling project aiming to restore native grasses and remove invasive species is unfolding.



Grassland enthusiast Cade Campbell dragging invasive-exotic Amur Honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*), an ecologically destructive species at Rocky Mount, from the open forest bordering the grasslands. Photo by Don Davis

Melanie Kelley is charged with re-establishing acres of native grassland at Rocky Mount. For at least the past 60 years these pastures had been mowed and the grass baled. Kelley began walking the fields, looking at dried seed heads for evidence of native species. After walking and watching all last winter, Kelley realized the fields were full of unknown grasses, and very few herbaceous plants. She contacted specialists from the Department of Biological Sciences and the Pollinator Research Group, both at East Tennessee State University (ETSU), and, "every naturalist I know," she said. "We all saw the same thing—an incredible and very different ecosystem than other open spaces in Northeast Tennessee." Kelley requested and received permission for a full-blown restoration of 20-plus acres of native grasslands at Rocky Mount.

She then enlisted Cade Campbell, a member of Tri-Cities Young Naturalists (affiliated with the national organization iNaturalists), to help with species identification. When the fields were mowed in mid-July of this year, introduced grasses like Fescue and Johnson

grass seemed to dominate. It was a seeming disappointment, but as August rolled into September, the warm season grasses began to grow. The orange milkweed known as Butterfly Weed grew and bloomed. Passionflower vines and Southern Slender Ladies' Tresses popped up in abundance, which brought in the butterflies that use them as host plants. On display was a sea of reddish purple as the Purpletop grass set seed. Deep blue clumps of Bluestem grasses appeared, along with Purple Lovegrass and the milk chocolate stems of Broomsedge. That's when Dr. Foster (Frosty) Levy, Professor Emeritus in Biological Sciences at ETSU, where he taught Conservation Biology, came out to the site and declared the fields to be some of the purest stands of native grasses he had ever seen in East Tennessee.

Fast forward to October 31. Mel put out an invite to the Tri-Cities Young Naturalists, iNaturalists, and local Sierra Club Conservation Committees including Tri-Cities and Care NET. Several members responded, and met at Rocky Mount on a warm, sunny fall day. Cade led the group through the grasslands, pointing out and identifying a dizzying number of native grasses and other plant species that are now repopulating the meadows, as well as bird species feeding on those grasses and late summer blooms.

The following Saturday was a workday headed by Mel and Don Davis, who championed the restoration of the woods and grasslands to restore the 20 acres closer to its 1790s ecology. Don is a Master Gardener and head of maintenance at Rocky Mount. Boots-on-the-ground included students doing a service project for Alpha Phi Omega fraternity/sorority at ETSU; members of Tri-Cities Young Naturalists; iNaturalists; Care NET CCC and Tri-Cities Sierra Club members — around 20 in all. Armed with clippers, loppers, and a lone chainsaw, they cut and dragged a huge quantity of invasive Amur (bush) Honeysuckle from a section of woods to the edge of the road to be hauled away. Time well spent. They can't wait to see this bit of 'native prairie and woodland' come to life again next Spring!

Follow the progress of this restoration project: <https://bit.ly/RockyMountRestore>.

Contact Bobbi at ardia1952@yahoo.com



Head of Maintenance at Rocky Mount Don Davis (left) takes a break with Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity/sorority member Jackson Hutchins during removal of invasive Amur (bush) Honeysuckle from the restoration site.

Walking the Grasslands in Rocky Mount

by Cade Campbell, Guest Writer

Time spent "Walking the Grasslands" at Rocky Mount State Historic Site was great. The birds, late-season wildflowers and warm-season grasses put on quite a show. This humble stretch of remnant prairie in Piney Flats was converted into some of East Tennessee's first European-style farmland in the late 1700s. Undamaged patches of native grasses, hazelnut thickets and ancient trees have been a sanctuary for animals and plants dodging modernity for centuries. Coincidentally, it also serves as a pleasant place for humans to hide from the jaws of mainstream 21st century.

As our grassland restoration project begins to flourish, it's amazing how much has survived and remained hidden or unnoticed here. Now that the field is allowed to flourish, swathes of broomsedge (*Andropogon virginicus*) and little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) have erupted into living rainbows of almost every color (except maybe blue). They take over the shift after Purpletop Tridens (*Tridens flavus*) puts on a vibrant show across all of the adjacent ridges, brandishing wiry panicles of violet seed. Foxes playfully dodge photo ops, slinking deep into surrounding thickets, and Mearns' Cottontails (*Sylvilagus floridanus mearnsi*), the Midwestern edition of the familiar Eastern Cottontail, frolic in shorter grasses, where they can spot adversaries with plenty of time for a leisurely escape.

Many singing insects, some fairly unusual, inhabit the grasslands. These include the impeccably camouflaged Curve-tailed Bush Katydid (*Scudderia curvicauda*) and the alien-esque Hook-faced Conehead (*Pyrgocorypha unciata*). Overhead, many migrant birds descend here as they cross the Watauga River Valley, while meadowlarks and blue grosbeaks keep watch over buckthorn hedges during the summer. A nighthawk might also make a brief appearance, soaring south at dusk in the fall.

And of course, there are some really cool "non-graminoids"; including our very own native orchids (Southern Ladies Tresses, *Spiranthes lacera gracilis*, etc.). Also Honeyvine (*Cynanchum laeve*), a weird climbing milkweed, serves as a valuable host for the caterpillars of stopover Monarch butterflies.

I'm very excited to see this "prairie" recover over the next few years, and hopefully well into the future, with flourishing native habitat.

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Above: Splitbeard Bluestem (*Andropogon ternarius*), in Rocky Mount Historic Site, a gorgeous grass, native to the Southeast, that provides food and habitat for countless birds, butterflies, mammals, etc., even supporting other grasses and wildflowers as they begin to flourish. Also, notice the panicles of another native grass' seeds, Purpletop (*Tridens flavus*), dangling in the background.

Right: Chrysalides (cocoons) of the variegated fritillary. "The reason it was so exciting for me to see so many variegated fritillaries at Rocky Mount is because their chrysalides are the most beautiful of all the native leps [Lepidopterans]," Melanie Kelley, who is directing the native grass restoration project, said. "When folks see them up close and personal, they think they are gemstones." Passionflower vines have survived in the grasslands at the Site and the variegated fritillary will use them as a host plant for its caterpillars. Photo by Melanie Kelley, 2017.



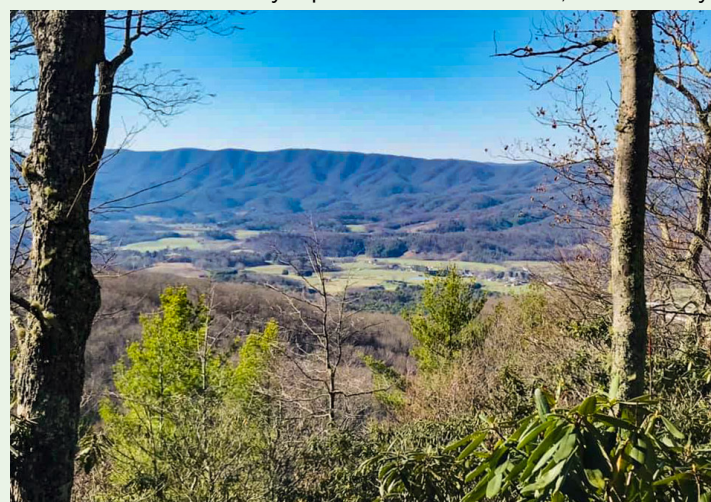
Doe Mountain Recreation Area Recipient of Governor's Stewardship Award

by Marshall Adesman, Volunteer Writer

Sitting in the extreme northeastern part of Tennessee, Johnson County looks like a finger directing people into Virginia or North Carolina or points east. But it really ought to be pointing inward, as if to say "Don't pass me by, there is plenty to see and do right here." For instance, the Doe Mountain Recreation Area (DMRA). Never heard of it? Well, the Tennessee governor's office has in Nashville. The story behind Doe Mountain's recent development, the work being done to make it an even-more-attractive destination, as well as its natural beauty, enabled Johnson County to become the first county to win the 2020 Governor's Environmental Stewardship Awards (GESAs) new Natural Resources category, which recognizes groups that go "above and beyond" when it comes to protecting or improving the environment.

It is an award Johnson County richly deserved. Its Doe Mountain Recreation Area is one of the largest remaining stretches of privately-owned woodland in the Appalachians, encompassing 8,600 acres. The centerpiece of Johnson County's Adventure Tourism District, it offers more than 60 miles of multi-use trails for hiking, plus controversial but popular horseback and Sierra Club-discouraged motorized off-road vehicle (ORV) riding.

No matter how you traverse the trails, you can come upon as many as 40 rare species of plants and animals, as well as a number of places to stop and take in the breathtaking scenery of both the adjacent ridges and the valleys just below. Grouse Ridge, for instance, offers a wooden platform overlooking Doe Valley. But a more comprehensive and historic experience can be found at the Kettlefoot Fire Lookout Tower. Built in 1936 by the Civilian Conservation Corps and recently restored with a grant from the Appalachian Regional Commission, the 60-foot structure sits at the very top of Doe Mountain's 3,889 feet. If you have the leg



Taken from Lofty Top View along trail 20 in Doe Mountain Recreation Area. Photo by Tate Davis.

and lung power to climb the staircase, you will be rewarded with views into three states — Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, Whitetop Mountain in Virginia, and Watauga Lake and Roan Mountain in Tennessee.

The story behind DMRA is every bit as captivating as the scenery. Back in 2005, all 8,600

acres were purchased by a developer, who planned to populate it with homes. But then serendipity came to nature's defense. Before any earth could be moved, the developer declared bankruptcy. His adversity proved to be good fortune for the rest of us when in 2012 The Nature Conservancy purchased the land for \$8.8 million, then transferred the title to the State of Tennessee within a matter of days. In November of 2013, DMRA was opened to the public for multiple-use recreation as well as natural resource protection.

The GESAs, co-presented by the Governor and the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC), are considered to be the most prestigious environmental and conservation awards in Tennessee. Established in 1986, they are designed to shine a spotlight on those whose work makes outstanding contributions to the preservation and protection of community and state natural resources, in addition to increasing the knowledge and awareness of effective conservation and environmental practices and projects. A nine-person panel, representing the agricultural, conservation, forestry, environmental and academic professions, judges the nominees, looking at on-the-ground environmental achievement, innovation, transferability, partnerships, and public education.

The awards also encourage leadership by example, and the DMRA has certainly embraced that role wholeheartedly. According to Executive Director Tate Davis, major improvements are being readied. Backed by a million-dollar grant from the Federal Recreational Trails Program, a comprehensive assessment is expected to lead to the addition of more trails and viewpoints, the improvement of many of the current trails, and an enhancement of the trailhead at Harbin Hill. By adding extra trails, it is hoped that more hikers will include Doe Mountain — often called "the Backbone of Johnson County" — in their bucket list, along with regional staples like the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, the Appalachian Trail, and the Iron Mountain Trail.

When he mounted the podium to declare this year's winners, Tennessee Governor Bill Lee stated that, "These awards show that responsible environmental stewardship is happening across our state." Mike Taylor, Mayor of Johnson County, could not agree more. The County's partnership with the Doe Mountain Recreation Area, he said, maintains "an environmental standard that seeks to preserve the integrity of the mountain... We will always strive to balance tourism with protecting our county's greatest natural resources."

Winning the Natural Resources 2020 GESAs would seem to indicate that Johnson County's finger-like shape is also pointing the way for Tennessee's other 94 counties.

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Talking to Climate Deniers

by Aaron Butler, Volunteer Writer

With climate change mitigation once again at the forefront of American policy, climate change denial is not going anywhere and neither are the swarms of self-interested organizations that stand to profit from popularizing climate change denial.

We've all been there; sitting at a table with family, friends, colleagues or even strangers when the now-highly-politicized phrase is heard: "Climate Change!" You hear "I don't believe in that stuff," and the hair on your neck begins to bristle as you brace yourself for names like "George Soros" or "Greta Thunberg" to be spoken with a tone of contempt.

Our first instinct in the above scenario may be "fight or flight," however, neither of these two strategies will do the world any good. So how do we approach this conversation productively? How do we inspire those who have already made their minds up on the subject to do more research without entrenching themselves further into their incorrect position?

Professor Dodd Galbreath, Associate Professor and Director of the Institute for Sustainable Practice at Lipscomb University (LU), offered insight into how to approach these difficult conversations in a civil way. Galbreath earned a B.S. in Agricultural Science and an M.S. in Urban and Regional Planning with an emphasis in Natural Resource Policy. In his career spanning over three decades, Dodd has worked for private corporations, environmental organizations, Tennessee government, and can be currently found shaping eager minds in the field of sustainability at LU. Dodd has often found himself collaborating amongst numerous stakeholders with competing interests as well as various levels of scientific understanding and, in all instances, it is his mission to partner productively in pursuit of mutually beneficial goals. Dodd is quick to share that his insights are by no means a silver bullet to overcome climate change denial, but instead intended to put us in the right frame of mind when discussing climate change.

I shared with Galbreath one of the comments I hear most frequently from Climate Change Deniers: "The climate is always changing!" So, how do we respond? Dodd recommends we start out by acknowledging its validity. Yes, the earth's climate has changed many times; Professor Galbreath is quick to point out that Middle Tennessee actually sits on a bed of limestone which means an ocean was here. Over the timespan of millions of years, Middle Tennessee has been tropical, glacial, and everything in between. What is new, however, is the current rate of change. "We do have the technology to look millions of years into the past," Dodd says. "Previous climate changes have taken place, but today things are much different. We're seeing changes take place over decades and even years; changes that previously it's taken a cataclysmic event such as a meteor strike or large volcanic eruption to make happen."

What tips does Galbreath have for staying on the right track during these difficult conversations?

Tip # 1 Show respect and let go of your own judgment. When people feel that you respect them and appreciate them, they are more likely to listen. When they feel that you don't respect them, they're more likely to shut down. "We are failing at this right and left," Galbreath says. "Civility is built into the rules of dialogue. You are contending with people's worldviews and you'll hear a lot of, 'I don't trust that your information and sources are accurate.'" At this point it will be helpful to better understand what sources they do trust and why.

Tip #2 Find something they care about, like their budget, and approach it from there. Even people that don't believe in climate change don't like the idea of rising expenses. Frame the impacts of climate change in financial terms. "It's okay to make a breakthrough using an economic point," Galbreath says. For instance, the reality that food will become more expensive as crops begin to fail is a fact that probably doesn't sit well with any of us.

Tip #3 Don't make statements — ask questions. "It's our job to help them by asking questions that make them want to learn more for themselves," Galbreath says. For example, try asking something like, "are there any environmental issues that do concern you?" and see where that takes the conversation.

Tip #4 Stay informed on current trends related to climate change. For instance, it's good to know that a group of Republicans who *do* believe in climate change, the Young Conservatives for Carbon Dividends, recently set up a booth at the 2020 Conservative Political Action Conference, to speak to members of their party who aren't yet on board with addressing the problem. Sharing this information with a climate change denier may spark some curiosity in them and be their impetus for further investigation.

Remember, this conversation is a marathon, not a sprint. The chances of converting a Denier to a card-carrying Sierra Club member in the span of one conversation are, as my Dad used to say, "slim to none and slim left town." Taking a lead from Galbreath, instead of attempting to answer all their questions try instead to inspire them to continue asking questions even if the answers are not easily found or understood. Remind them that there is a lot of information out there and that the science is complicated.

In short; be kind, be thoughtful and (most importantly) be patient.

Contact Aaron at abutler@essentialrecruitingllc.com

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Join These Supporters of Our Lobbyist!

Our sincere thanks go to the recent contributors to the Defenders Fund campaign and to all of you who have donated to this effort. The Defenders supports our critical legislative activities in Tennessee, including the work of our full-time lobbyist and Conservation Coordinator, Scott Banbury. We have not yet met our goal for our annual fundraising campaign, but we are hopeful that we will with your help.

The Defenders Fund campaign has enabled the Sierra Club to become a stronger and more visible presence in the halls of the state legislature. This allows us to work more effectively towards passage of bills that protect our air, water, land, wildlife, and the people of Tennessee. Because the Defenders Fund is a volunteer effort, there are no administrative expenses and 100% of your donation goes to supporting the program. Please help put us over the top by donating to the Defenders of Tennessee.

THANK YOU!

Sherry Loller, Chair, Defenders Fund TN Chapter
sherryloller@hotmail.com

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The Defenders is a nonpartisan, nonprofit 501(c)(4) organization and donations are not income-tax deductible.

Politics in the Age of Covid (continued from page 3)

well-funded. Maybe money would always be important, but it seemed misguided to dismiss from electoral relevance the powerful movements for youth, women's rights and Black lives surging nationwide. These movements had obviously made a crucial difference in Marquita's surprise victory, and we needed to mobilize them for other endorsed candidates as well.

We finally chose seven candidates to endorse - all genuine environmental champions. Rather than career politicians, they were citizens with unique experience and strong qualifications, stepping up to offer leadership. They were Marquita Bradshaw, Blair Walsingham, Renee Hoyos, Jane George, Elizabeth Rowland, Jay Clark, Virginia Couch and Gloria Johnson. The candidates were the electoral manifestation of the Women's March, the Movement for Black Lives and the Climate Strike Movement. While citizen activists were shutting down pipelines, defending abortion clinics and upending our ideas about policing, our candidates were positioning themselves to forge the movements' larger intentions into legislation.

We had to turn this phenomenal energy into votes. And we had to do it in the middle of a pandemic where there would be no door-knocking or large rallies. Renee Hoyos, running for Tennessee's 2nd congressional district and the first candidate we'd connected with, figured out a Covid campaign technique: *Knittin' and Politickin*, a series of online video conversations with unique citizens. Other candidates followed suit. Jay Clark videoed a rousing series of front porch conversations which he called *Scrappy-time*. Blair Walsingham spoke with her supporters on a platform called *It's Your Vote*. These short exchanges were more engaging than political speeches. People not only got to know how the candidates thought, but met new people in their districts who were already doing fantastic things.

The final component that put it all together was music. Maggie Longmire, who was energizing our political team, is well known to both music lovers and environmentalists, having headlined last year's Concert for the Climate. And Jay Clark, a popular figure in the music scene, was already using his music to communicate with voters. We

all began gathering support from other musical talents to put together a kind of virtual political variety show we called "Tennessee on the Rise." We wove candidate conversations in with musical performances and put it all together with narration and visuals from regional photographers and videographers. It opened as a Facebook event on Oct. 13, and both parts are still available on YouTube:

(<https://bit.ly/HBG-YouTube>).

The last thing we had to do was pull Sierra Club members into campaign activity. Here we worked with national Sierra Club staffer Megan Fitzgerald to create a tiered series of Zoom conversations and phone banks to mobilize members into joining our endorsed candidates' phone and text parties. This proved the most difficult part of our work. Club members vote at very high rates and they contribute generously to campaigns. And though the Political Team phoned and texted extensively and maintained communication with campaign managers, we ultimately failed to sufficiently mobilize our membership to create victory for a range of excellent candidates who admittedly had always been long shots.. The only winner of our eight endorsees was Gloria Johnson.

On the national level, however, Sierra Club efforts made a huge difference. In addition to working with our local endorsees, many in HBG participated in the Sierra Club's Independent Action or Battleground Campaign. This involved participating in phone, text and letter-writing parties nationwide. According to Ariel Hayes, our National Political Director, the Club mobilized more than 35,000 volunteers and reached nearly 2 million voters. We sent 127 million letters, made 5 million phone calls, and sent nearly 20 million text messages to swing states. It's hard not to believe that all this record-shattering activity made a big difference in moving several states over to Biden and defeating Donald Trump. I'm working on a batch of letters right now to voters in Georgia. The movement is alive and well in America and has plenty of energy to continue the fight into the Biden Administration.

Contact Kent at kminault@gmail.com

Dear Eartha : Advice from An Eco-Guru

Dear Eartha,

I have known for years that light pollution prevents most of the world from actually seeing the stars. My 5-year-old son has a star-chart ceiling to replace our being actually able to see real stars in the night sky. But I recently heard about Dark Sky places as an environmental occurrence in the world. What's the benefit of this and how do I find out more?

— Miss Dancing with the Real Stars!

Dear Dancing,

You are so right about most of us when you talk about most of us never getting to see those starry skies that I'm told are still up there. And, I, too, wanted to know more about Dark Sky places so I drove to Pickett CCC Memorial State Park in Pickett County, Tennessee, just north of Jamestown. Guess what? We have our very own Dark Sky Park in Tennessee. An organization called the International Dark Sky Association (IDA) has designated Pickett State Park as a protected place for outdoor conservation that provides "good outdoor lighting" and "dark sky programs."

Pickett State Park is one of 130 certified International Dark Sky Places (IDSPs) in the world! I know – right here in Tennessee. A woman I spoke to while paddling our canoes on Arch Lake said she thought she'd have to travel to New Zealand to find a Dark Sky place. But what's the benefit? According to IDA's website, the negative effect of light upon ecosystems has to do with plants and animals' (including human animals') dependence upon "Earth's daily cycle of light and dark rhythms," which impact "reproduction, nourishment, sleep, and protection from predators," and most especially "nocturnal ecology." Artificial light disrupts everything from prey species using darkness as cover to amphibians' nighttime croaking, which is part of their breeding ritual.

A few specific species disrupted by light pollution include sea turtles, bird species, and insects' "fatal attraction" to artificial light. Other trouble areas are outdoor light costs to communities through the impact of energy use. And a study published in *The Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* found little evidence of harmful effects when nighttime lighting is reduced with switch-off, part-night lighting, dimming, or changes to white light/LEDs. (vol. 69, issue 11).

But the bottom line for most of us is we and our children and grandchildren just want to see the stars! And the good news is there are many places to go – along with many activist opportunities to create a star-protected planet where we can look at constellations in places other than planetariums.

Yes, we have our work cut out for us. But, in the meantime head to one of the Dark Sky places and enjoy the dark. Find out where at:
<https://www.darksky.org/idsp/finder/>

Yours,
Eartha

Dear Eartha is written by Rita Bullinger.

Submit your question for Eartha to SierraTNNews@gmail.com

The New Litter: Disposable Masks

by Lisa Luck, Solid Waste Consultant and Volunteer Writer



Facemasks collected in a litter pick-up in Oakwood neighborhood, Knoxville, TN. Photo by Emily Ellis

Like it or not, masks will be a part of our lives for an unknown period of time thanks to Covid-19. Covid-19 is most easily spread through droplets from our respiratory systems propelled outward through breathing, singing, coughing and/or sneezing. Properly worn masks contain our respiratory droplets and keep others from being exposed to any viruses or diseases we may harbor. When we wear masks – we protect others. When others wear masks – they protect us. Containing our own respiratory waste has become crucial in preventing the spread of this virus.

Masks can either be disposable masks or can be made from cloth. Like many other items we use to make our lives easier and more convenient, disposable masks are easily obtained and inexpensive. But as far as waste goes, masks create the same disposal issues as other disposable items. Disposable masks contain plastics that enter the environment once they are thrown away. Whether they are thrown out as litter or whether they are put in the garbage, they will deteriorate over time and degrade into microplastics. These are the same microplastics currently choking our rivers, streams and oceans. Another issue with disposable masks is that the elastic used to hold the mask on one's face can easily get tangled around an animal's feet, legs, head or body. So before throwing a mask away, cut the elastic to prevent it from causing harm to wildlife.

Although less convenient than a disposable mask, a cloth mask causes less harm to the environment. It can be made from scrap cloth that doesn't contain plastic so it will decompose completely once it is discarded. It can be reused and thereby reduces the amount of waste that we generate throughout our lifetimes.

Homemade masks can be made using patterns posted on the Internet using your own used clothing. The way to know if your homemade mask is working to contain respiratory droplets is to put on your mask and then try to blow out a candle. A good mask will prevent the candle from being blown out.

Masks have recently become one of the most littered items. Six months ago, masks were seldom found along roadsides or in parking lots. Now, discarded masks are found everywhere. They are lightweight and easily wash into waste water systems where they travel to the ocean – unless they get tangled in the waterways or around an animal. Some people put them in paper or plastic recycling collection bins in the hope that they can be recycled. Masks cannot be recycled. They may be contaminated and therefore must go into a garbage container.

Using a mask is an important choice to make to protect ourselves and others. Masks can serve as a reminder to prevent accidental spread of the virus by touching our faces. For those who do not require N95-level protection, choosing a mask that doesn't negatively affect the environment is another important choice. Cloth masks reduce the amount of waste generated and are environmentally friendly because they decompose rather than persisting in the environment.



Facemasks protect us from Covid-19. Photo retrieved from Unsplash.com.

Contact Lisa at lisaluck.work@gmail.com

Nashville Refill Shops Offer an Alternative to Plastic Reliance

by Kristen Cherry, Volunteer Writer

Two locally-owned businesses in the Nashville area are taking the bull of plastic waste by the horns. The Good Fill, located in East Nashville, and Sage Refill Market, near Nashville's bustling 12South and Edgehill Village areas, offer bulk refills to customers looking to lower the one-and-done cycle that accompanies most cleaning and personal care products.

Amid waves of messages about single-use plastics, recycling has increased, but comes nowhere near the amount of plastic that heads to the landfill. The Environmental Protection Agency reported that as recently as 2017 over 70 million pounds of plastic were generated; over 50 million pounds of it went to the landfill.

Environmentally-conscious entrepreneurs like The Good Fill's Megan Gill give consumers a way to break the habit. Offering both consumable home products like shampoos and multi-purpose cleaners, as well as sustainable one-time purchases like bamboo kitchen gadgets, The Good Fill serves as that next big step toward a lower-to-zero-waste household.

The Good Fill's southwesterly neighbor, Sage Refill Market, dedicates itself to providing natural bath, body, and home products both in sustainably packaged containers and in bulk from the shop's refill stations. Visitors to the store, either in person or online, will find products from plastic-free ponytail holders to

stretchy silicone "huggers" that serve as an alternative to plastic wrap for hard-to-store items like those pesky grapefruit halves left over after breakfast.

More obvious plastic offenders—cleaning products, hair products, food storage—have a heavy and expected presence in refill stores, but there are plenty of less-expected items for the low-waste warrior. Among the ones just dying to be put in a mason jar: mouthwash tablets, wool dryer balls, and baking soda.

Though companies like Proctor & Gamble have set packaging sustainability goals, the deadlines are a long way off (2030); till then, it's the habit that needs changing, but most people don't know refill options exist until they make a concerted effort to find them. Once you have, the next step is using them. The great thing (besides helping the planet): these shops are dedicated to the cause. While they're located in metropolitan areas, they make it easy for consumers, local or not, to access their products with local delivery and curbside pickup, online ordering options, and refill pouches that can be mailed back and forth.

Both shops can be found on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, but a good old fashioned phone call works, too. Try out the refill process and share it so we can quit the habit of plastic dependency.

Contact Kristen at kristenlwc@gmail.com

PATCH OF LIGHT IN DEEP WOODS

by Maurice Manning

The green of the ground is yellow-green
 from one revealing shaft of the sun
 looking at it, and looking up
 I see the leaning column of light,
 its iris-crown surrounded by green
 and the bright emptiness of light
 coming through the canopy.
 I listen silently to the silence,
 and then six or seven, a spiral stream
 of hummingbirds pours through the hole
 as silver-green swirled down a funnel;
 around the patch of green
 of the ground is a coil of trumpet vine
 and even the flourish of courtesy
 before the orange bells is silent,
 like a knife drawn silently across
 a strop – the little birds slid down
 the blind light and bowed, and then
 they disappeared. I waved my hand
 over the patch but made no shadow
 in that place, and I waved it again to be sure.
 I don't know what to do, but say
 it happened twice, without a sound.

This poem first appeared in One Man's Dark and was published with permission from the author. Manning lives in Washington County, Kentucky, and teaches at Transylvania University.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

Here is your opportunity to participate in the important work done in the Tennessee State Chapter. Please consider serving on one of the following committees. To learn more about a committee, contact the person listed.

Fundraising: Mac Post 865-938-3116, chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org
 Conservation: Bill Moll, 423-702-5779, whmoll@aol.com
 Environmental Justice: Marquita Bradshaw, 901-647-8884, quitabrad@yahoo.com
 Membership: Mac Post 865-938-3116, chapter.chair@tennessee.sierraclub.org

January Chapter Retreat Replaced with Virtual Business Meeting

The Sierra Club's Safety Management Team is requiring that we not hold in-person meetings through March 1, 2021. Therefore, the Winter Chapter Retreat scheduled for January 29-31 is canceled. The **Chapter Executive Committee** will meet via Zoom on **Saturday, January 30, at 9:00 Central, 10:00 Eastern**. The meeting will include the installation of newly elected Chapter at-large delegates and the election of Chapter Officers.

RSVP here: <https://bit.ly/TNSC-Excom-March2021>

NEW POSITION

Campaign Representative - Beyond Coal Campaign

The Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign is hiring a Campaign Representative to lead a multidisciplinary team in Tennessee, in coordination with volunteers, partner groups and community leaders, to develop and implement a campaign that achieves the SC vision for climate and environmental justice. More details and an application form are at <https://bit.ly/SC-CareerCenter>

RETREAT SCHEDULE

| | LOCATION | DATES |
|-------------|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Winter 2021 | Cancelled due to COVID-19 | --- |
| Spring 2021 | Fall Creek Falls State Park | April 30-May 2 |
| Fall 2021 | Pickett State Park | October 29-31 |
| Winter 2022 | Cedars of Lebanon SP | January 14-16 |

With the 12th anniversary of the horrific, Kingston coal ash spill of December 22, 2008, just behind us, we honor the dedicated workers who cleaned it up, and who, denied any protection or support, have lost their health or their lives.
Never again!

MEETINGS

The Sierra Club continues to pause all in-person meetings.

Most groups and conservation committees are meeting online. Check a meeting status:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/tennessee/sierra-club-tennessee-calendar> or scan the QR code ==>

If you would like to attend, please contact the group or committee chair. Contact information is on page 2.



Group Program Meetings

| Group | Date | Location | Time |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Cherokee (Chattanooga) | Mon 1/25, 2/22, 3/22 | Check for Virtual/On Line | TBA |
| Chickasaw (Memphis) | Tue 1/21, 2/18, 3/18 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 6:30 PM |
| Harvey Broome (Knoxville) | Tue 1/12, 2/9, 3/9 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 7:00 PM |
| Middle TN (Nashville) | Thu 1/14, 2/11, 3/11 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 7:00 PM |

Group Business Meetings

| Group | Date | Location | Time |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Cherokee (Chattanooga) | Mon 1/4, 2/1, 3/1 | Check for Virtual/On Line | TBA |
| Chickasaw (Memphis) | Wed 1/6, 2/3, 3/3 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 6:30 PM |
| Harvey Broome (Knoxville) | Tue 1/26, 2/23, 3/23 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 7:00 PM |
| Middle TN (Nashville) | Mon 1/18, 2/15, 3/15 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 6:30 PM |

Regional Conservation Committee Business Meetings

| Committee | Date | Location | Time |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Clarksville | Tue 1/19, 2/16, 3/16 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 6:00 PM |
| CareNET (Rogersville) | Tue 1/7, 2/4, 3/4 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 6:00 PM |
| Watauga (Mountain City) | Tue 1/19, 2/16, 3/16 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 5:00 PM |
| Tri-Cities | Tue 1/12, 2/9, 3/9 | Check for Virtual/On Line | 7:00 PM |